

# Human Resources Initiatives

## Tools for Day-to-Day Employee Relations

When the [Trial Court Employment Protection and Governance Act \(Sen. Bill 2140\)](#) took effect in 2001, California courts became the employers of 19,000 staff members formerly considered county employees. Then the [Trial Court Interpreter Employment and Labor Relations Act \(Sen. Bill 371\)](#) in 2002 gave many independent-contractor court interpreters the right to apply for trial court employment (with collective bargaining rights), adding these members to the court family.

Many courts were not fully equipped with the expertise in human resources to deal with employee administration. In response to the need, the Administrative Office of the Courts' Human Resources Division began to design tools that courts could use for such employment tasks as setting pay scales and benefits, negotiating labor contracts, administering retirement programs, recruiting and training new staff members, and compensating employees for work-related injuries or illnesses.

Several human resources programs are currently up and running to meet the needs of courts statewide:

- The Labor and Employee Relations Services and Support initiative was rolled out in 2002 to give superior courts the expertise to manage labor relations and to assist the courts as needed. Information and procedural help come from the Labor and Employee Relations Unit of the AOC's Human Resources Division.
- The Trial Court Benefits Program, in effect since 2003, is a comprehensive and competitive health and benefits alternative for trial court employees. It was created after research was conducted on designing and implementing a statewide, multiple-employer benefits program; continual evolution is planned to meet the needs of trial courts. By January 2005, 24 courts had chosen to participate.
- The Judicial Branch Workers' Compensation Program, a self-insured system administered by a third party, was developed after a study determined the feasibility of a unified program for all courts. As an incentive to courts to join the program, the cost of participating was stabilized for the first two fiscal years, so that no rate increases would occur through the end of June 2005. By that date, 54 courts were participating.
- The Court Human Resources Information System (CHRIS), a tool on the same platform as the statewide court accounting tool CARS (see page 74), will address courts' personnel management needs. Currently in development, CHRIS is scheduled to begin phased implementation in 2006. Court human resources professionals participated in the information-gathering stage, and the AOC is offering project management and oversight. A model court will begin testing the program in fall 2005.

## Help With Labor Negotiations

As part of its human resources program, the AOC's Labor and Employee Relations Unit has developed a strategic plan for labor negotiations, served as chief negotiator for courts, and offered labor mediation and investigative services, when courts request them.

The AOC's Human Resources Division holds Labor Relations Forums twice annually, at which court managers solve problems, share information, and discuss labor issues. Trial Court Outlet, a password-protected Web site on the judicial branch Intranet, is specifically for trial court administrators to exchange information about labor agreements and court personnel policies. The Human Resources Division also offers the Labor Relations Academy, an interactive three-day program on labor relations topics with lectures, exercises, group activities, information exchanges, and mock negotiations.

## Impacts

- Court human resources personnel receive training from AOC programs and can consult with experts from the AOC.
- Court employees are protected by a reliable, self-insured workers' compensation program that offers improved and more cost-effective case management of workers' compensation claims.
- Trial courts can offer their employees the statewide court benefits plan, saving them the costs and effort of researching and designing individual health and benefits programs.

**Administrative Office of the Courts, Human Resources Division,  
455 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94102-3688**

**Project contact: Scott L. Gardner, Labor and Employee Relations Unit Manager,  
415-865-7545, [scott.gardner@jud.ca.gov](mailto:scott.gardner@jud.ca.gov)**